

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

## Enduring Indigenous Histories across the Americas

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This essay reviews the following works:

**Negotiating Autonomy. Mapuche Territorial Demands and Chilean Land Policy.** By Kelly Bauer. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2021. Pp. ix + 179. \$ 46.00 hardcover. ISBN: 13: 978-0-8229-4666-3.

**The Indigenous Paradox. Rights, Sovereignty, and Culture in the Americas.** By Jonas Bens. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020. Pp. x + 245. \$ 70.00 hardcover. ISBN: 978-0-8122-5230-9.

**Native Peoples, Politics, and Society in Contemporary Paraguay. Multidisciplinary Perspectives.** Edited by Barbara A. Ganson. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2021. Pp. xv + 175. \$ 29.95 paperback. ISBN: 978-0-8263-6257-5.

**La frontera de arriba en Chile colonial.** By María Ximena Urbina Carrasco. Valparaíso and Santiago, Chile: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso and Centro de Investigaciones Diego Barros Arana, 2009. Pp. 354. Free ebook. ISBN: 978-956-17-0433-6.

**Indigenous Continent: The Epic Contest for North America.** By Pekka Hämäläinen. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a Division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2022. Pp. xv + 571. \$ 32.00 hardcover. ISBN: 978-1-63149-699-8.

**Saberes de la conversión. Jesuitas, indígenas e imperios coloniales en las fronteras de la cristiandad.** Edited by Guillermo Wilde. Buenos Aires: Editorial SB, 2011. Pp. 592. \$ 11.00 paperback. ISBN: 978-987-12-5693-8.

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“Enduring indigenous histories” provides the leitmotif for this review essay. It employs *histories* to encompass multidisciplinary approaches to understanding the ways Indigenous peoples are present and undeniably pivotal to societal, economic, and cultural developments of governance and human ecologies in the Americas. The works selected for this review cover a temporal range of over five centuries, offering a panorama of vastly different geographical regions in South and North America. They illustrate different scholarly methods for researching and interpreting the multiple strands of indigeneity through closely defined monographs like Kelly Bauer’s *Negotiating Autonomy* and Ximena Urbina’s *La frontera de arriba*; edited volumes on a single country or province, exemplified by Barbara Ganson’s *Native Peoples, Politics, and Society in Contemporary Paraguay*; thematically concise but geographically comparative studies like Jonas Bens’s overview

of legal cases focused on Indigenous sovereignty. Pekka Hämäläinen's sweeping narrative of the *Indigenous Continent* presents a panoply of multiple theaters of Indigenous and colonial encounters in North America over three centuries. Guillermo Wilde's edited volume *Saberes de la conversión* brings the important themes of knowledge creation and religious adaptation to the fraught relations between Indigenous peoples and colonial subjects in the Americas and beyond, in which imperial borderlands overlap with the "frontiers of Christendom." The integrative themes of these works center on sovereignty, territory, knowledge, and cultural and political frontiers. They place Indigenous peoples at the center of multistranded processes of globalization and Native persistence in both the early modern and modern periods of contested imperial expansion and nation-building.

This essay begins with the studies focused on contemporary developments in Chile and Paraguay as well as the modern legal frameworks for asserting claims to territory and political autonomy. It then turns to the *longue durée* historical narratives and thematic analyses centered on Indigenous nations in the contrasting geographies and borderlands of the Americas, with comparative references to Asian theaters of imperial incursions, cultural conflicts, and the evolution of native confederations and political alliances. The decision to include two historical works published more than a decade ago stems from the firm conviction of the value of their original contributions to Indigenous histories of South America and of the importance of bringing to the attention of current scholars and students of Latin American studies these outstanding examples of research methods and interpretations grounded in primary sources. Urbina's *Frontera de arriba*, focuses on the area of Chile south of the Araucanía, often associated with the Mapuche, and it expands our conceptual framework for frontier, colonialism, and spatial history. The contributors to Wilde's *Saberes de la conversión*, places the Indigenous histories of colonial Ibero-America in a global and comparative framework of early modern imperialism.

In *Negotiating Autonomy*, Kelly Bauer brings extensive fieldwork to her critical analysis of neoliberalism in post-Pinochet Chile. Using the disciplinary methods of political science, Bauer's central conclusion is that the expected pattern of neoliberal policies would be to demand consistently an option for privatization. Yet Chilean governmental dependencies found it necessary to negotiate with the Mapuche collective entities. Set in the southern borderlands of Mapuche territory surrounding the provincial city of Temuco—in what was once the powerful Araucanía—Bauer's study underscores the contingent nature of negotiations between Mapuche demands for land, self-determination, and autonomy, and the Chilean state. Her research challenges the classic definitions of neoliberalism as a panoply of market-driven exchanges to insist that the marketplace model of governance is insufficient to explain the webs of negotiations both within and outside official institutions, in "a middle space where Mapuche demands and Chilean governance are consequentially contested" (9). She shows that the outcomes of specific instances of confrontation and negotiation were hardly predictable, and often contradictory, within a neoliberal ideological framework and from one historical episode to another. Her central thesis posits that the Chilean government's land policies evolved in response to the Mapuche communities' separate and reiterated territorial demands and their proven capacity for mobilization. It should be noted that the cultural dimension of Mapuche struggles for language, territory, and autonomy are foregrounded in recent publications produced by Mapuche scholars, especially from Ediciones Comunidad de Historia Mapuche in Temuco.<sup>1</sup>

The legal foundation for similar histories of contested negotiation rests on Indigenous Law 19.253, promulgated in 1993, and the establishment of the National Corporation for Indigenous Development (CONADI) under governmental auspices. This institutional

<sup>1</sup> An excellent reference is the *LARR* review essay by Sebastián López and José Antonio Lucero, "Wallmapu Rising: New Paths in Mapuche Studies," *Latin American Research Review* 53, no. 3 (2018): 648–654.

apparatus did not set in motion outright land grants to Indigenous communities; rather, it established the procedures through which communities and individuals could petition the government for subsidized land purchases and transference of title to historically occupied land. Bauer's structured interviews with Mapuche activists, community members, and government bureaucrats, led her to conclude that the contested negotiations over territory and autonomy did not occur solely or even principally through the institutions created to administer public policies. Indigenous activists mobilized outside the formal constraints of governing institutions even as bureaucrats and politicians negotiated with individual leaders and peddled influence outside their official capacity, distributing material benefits in anticipation of upcoming elections. Bauer documents the bureaucratic procedures for soliciting land and obtaining lots with measurements and titles from the points of view of both CONADI officials and Mapuche solicitants. Her analysis focuses on the need for communities to "prove insistence" and on a quantitative comparison of the success rate across institutional pathways or direct mobilization. Her conclusions point to the wider horizon of contemporary Latin America through Indigenous demands for *territorio y dignidad*, citing mobilizations in Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, and Mexico that have asserted rights for recognition as collective entities, respect for customary law, protection of communal property rights, official status for Indigenous languages, access to education, and curricula that include Indigenous languages and cultural knowledge (14–16).

*Native Peoples, Politics, and Society in Contemporary Paraguay* brings together ten authors from different national traditions and methodologies in sociology, anthropology, history, and political science. Editor and author Barbara A. Ganson's scholarship in Paraguayan ethnohistory and her direct experience in the country have prepared her well to organize this volume on contemporary Indigenous peoples of Paraguay. Occupying a strategic portion of the Paraguay and Paraná River basins bordering Brazil, Argentina, and Bolivia, this Latin American nation lay between the contested territorial domains of the Portuguese and Spanish empires in South America. For millennia before European contact, the Paraguayan borderlands were shaped by dense Indigenous populations of diverse cultural traditions, whose persistence is undeniable in the nation's languages, political culture, and forested ecology to the present day. The Guaraní constitute the most numerous Indigenous communities of Paraguay, but other native groups have asserted their claims to political and territorial rights, among them the Ayoreo, Guaicurú, Maskoy, and Mataco.

This book highlights some of the principal issues involving Indigenous peoples, rural to urban migrations, gender inequalities, political economy, and the transition to democracy after the dictatorship of General Alfredo Stroessner (1954–1989). Ganson's introduction provides historical context for the six substantive chapters that develop these themes. In addition, the authors have compiled an informative chronology of major events and a map showing the approximate locations of the territories of different native peoples. Ganson explains the purpose of this volume with a cultural metaphor: "Like *ñanduti*, (intricate spider-web lace) woven by artisans in Paraguay, this collection of essays underscores important patterns and threads that enable us to understand the texture of the country's society, economy, natural environment, and political culture" (13). René D. Harder Horst sets the political framework in the opening chapter, "Indigenous People in Paraguay and Latin America's Move to Democracy," by showing how Indigenous leaders and entire communities played an active role in shaping the Constitution of 1992 and, more profoundly, the lengthy process of transition from dictatorship to electoral democracy. Native political struggles in Paraguay were strengthened by their connections to international organizations, bringing them visibility on the world stage and solidarity with Indigenous peoples who faced similar problems of environmental degradation, loss of territory, threats of violence, and cultural assimilation. The direct participation of recognized Indigenous leaders in the Paraguayan Constitutional Convention marked a

dramatic turning point in the political culture of this new phase of Paraguayan governance and public debate.

Richard K. Reed's ethnography "The Guaraní from Forest People to Urban Refugees," highlights in vivid terms the human and ecological costs of the destruction of the Atlantic Forest of eastern Paraguay and the "Guaraní struggle for a place in their rapidly changing world" (38). Reed explains the symbiotic ecosystems and extraordinary biodiversity of these subtropical deciduous forests and their sustenance for both human and nonhuman nature, in view of Guaraní agroforestry techniques to cultivate, gather, fish, and hunt in the forest without destroying its capacity for rejuvenation. The Guaraní made the forest into a refuge of self-sufficiency without isolating themselves from the national economy through trading forest products that entered international markets. Beginning in the 1970s, USAID-funded projects for building roads and bridges led to rapidly expanding ranching and logging industries, propelling the eastern Atlantic Forest into one of the highest rates of deforestation recorded in the world. Internal demand for land by dispossessed (non-Indigenous) peasants brought ever-increasing waves of *colonos* into the eastern forests alongside the fast-growing soybean industry.

The conversion of increasing portions of the Atlantic Forest into pasture for livestock and extensive clearing for soybean monoculture constitute irreversible processes, eroding the rejuvenating quality of small-scale cyclical clearings and the regrowth of soil cover. Parallel to the rapid degradation of the forests, the construction of the Itaipú and Yacretá hydroelectric dams dispossessed more than one hundred thousand Indigenous and non-Indigenous peasants in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. As their way of life became untenable, Guaraní no longer planted their gardens but appeared in increasing numbers on the edges of new settlements, along the roadways, and as urban migrants in Encarnación, Asunción, and Ciudad del Este. Reed's fieldwork took him to these cities to witness the destructive effects of impoverishment, drug addiction, and crime, especially among Guaraní youth separated from their families and living precariously in encampments. In squatter settlements like Cerro Potý, on the outskirts of Asunción, entire families eke out a meager living from begging and scavenging in the landfills. Yet in these vastly changed environments, Indigenous migrants have organized to gain governmental recognition and assistance for housing, education, and basic health needs.

In western Paraguay, Paola Canova documents comparable processes of urban migration among Ayoreo families in the Mennonite town of Filadelfia, deep in the dry tropical forests of the Chaco. Ayoreo men, women, and youth earn money from day labor or from weekly or monthlong stints on the expanding cattle ranches and soy farms that surround the Chaco near the border with Bolivia. The squatter settlements that Canova observed grew out of decades of sporadic encounters and labor relations between the Ayoreo and Mennonite colonies, beginning in the early 1960s. As Mennonites expanded their commercial agricultural economy, overtaking greater portions of the Chaco, migratory Ayoreo and other displaced Indigenous groups grew proportionately, forming a labor reserve on the fringes of Filadelfia. Tensions increased between these migrant settlements and the Mennonite colonies, as the Ayoreos who sought to live within the city faced staunch opposition from the Mennonite administration. Anthropologists, missionaries (Salesian and Mennonite), and nongovernmental organization activists and volunteers have documented the conflicted negotiations as they interact with both Indigenous and Mennonite contenders. Canova argues from this history that "indigenous urbanity does not necessarily entail a process of deterritorialization[;] . . . rather, urban space and place are strategically reappropriated to create new social geographies" (54).

Sarah Patricia Cerna Villagrà, Sara Mabel Villalba Portillo, Eduardo Tamayo Belda, and Roque Mereles Pintos coauthored the chapter "Paraguay's Political System from Authoritarian Hegemony to Moderate Pluralism, 1954–2019." Stroessner's shadow overlays the authors' analysis of Paraguay's political parties over more than half a

century. Using the tools of political science, they demonstrate the correlation between the enduring strength of the two traditional political parties—the Asociación Nacional Republicana-Partido Colorado (ANR) and the Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico (PEN)—and Paraguay’s rigid socioeconomic structure based on ranching and export agriculture. Their history of the Stroessner regime underscores its “granitic unity” across the armed forces, the ANR party, and the state, and signals international support for Stroessner through Paraguay’s cooperation with the US national security doctrine (79). Notwithstanding the significant changes in Paraguayan society and politics after 1989, bringing new actors into the political arena and raising expectations for social and economic reforms, the authors stress the continuity of established political structures. Their detailed explanation of the 1992 Constitution and electoral analysis for recent years shows that while more than a dozen political parties operate in Paraguay, the ANR and the PEN dominate elections at both the national and the municipal levels.

Brian Turner’s chapter “Gender Quotas and Women’s Political Identities in Paraguay” analyzes Paraguayan electoral politics. Turner notes that while Paraguay established an electoral gender quota in 1996 for legislative elections and internal party politics, the country continues to show stubbornly low per centages of women elected to public office when compared with global and hemispheric rankings. Using statistical analyses generated by the World Economic Forum, Turner shows the relative progress of women elected to office in Paraguay and asks whether the number of women who hold office truly affects the status of women in society. He builds this chapter around the distinction among descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation to analyze the data gathered for mayoral, gubernatorial, and legislative elections. Turner concludes that women are gaining more candidacies and building careers in politics, but he cautions whether gender quotas have promoted women’s participation in politics more broadly or how their election to office has impacted public policy (130).

Melissa H. Birch turns the discussion to the economic sphere with her detailed analysis of the significance of Mercosur for Paraguay’s economic performance since the trading bloc was established with Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay by the Treaty of Asunción in 1991. In the three decades since its founding, Mercosur has grown with new member states and preferential trade agreements with countries beyond the Americas. Birch rehearses the strategies for Paraguay’s reliance on export-driven agricultural commodity production and its open economy prior to joining Mercosur, eschewing import substitution industrialization and making it “an entrepôt, selling electronics and luxury goods to Argentina and Brazil” (137). In the first decade of Paraguay’s democratic transition leading up to the Mercosur negotiations, politicians and government ministers debated the benefits of a regional common market against Paraguay’s profitable tri-border trade and its place in global commodity markets. Using data from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, Birch traces the impact on trade and direct foreign investment in Paraguay following its membership in Mercosur. She compares the value of imports and exports to and from the Mercosur countries to that of Paraguayan trade with countries outside the regional trade market, noting that some of the statistics may reflect transshipments (of soybeans, for example) through Brazil and Uruguay rather than their ultimate destination. Birch then turns to the important questions of economic growth and income distribution, concluding that while the Paraguayan gross domestic product has increased, the economy continues to concentrate income “among the wealthiest 20 percent of Paraguayans” (149). Conversely, the share of income held by the lowest fifth of the population fell by one-third from 1990 to 2014. Birch relates these economic data to the expansion of monocultural export agriculture and cattle ranching in eastern Paraguay and in the western Chaco, underscoring stark inequalities in land tenure and wealth. Although the last three chapters do not directly address the Indigenous peoples of Paraguay directly, they complement the complex histories of Indigenous cultural and

economic persistence in the face of dispossession and impoverishment through their analysis of internal political struggles and neoliberal policies of globalization.

Jonas Bens brings into sharp relief the conceptual and historical issues surrounding Indigenous sovereignty with the legal cases that he has compared in *The Indigenous Paradox: Rights, Sovereignty, and Culture in the Americas*. Bens sets up his central argument for the paradoxical nature of indigeneity in the opening pages of the book, which serves to integrate the separate histories culled from regions as disparate as British Columbia and Suriname. As he observes, Indigenous communities present themselves as sovereign nations governed by their own laws and not subject to a foreign power, yet they appeal their cases to the courts of nation-states, relying on administrative and judicial institutions to press claims for territorial integrity and the right to self-governance. He argues further “that the phenomenon of indigeneity comes into being when native communities engage with the law of the (post)colonial state in which they find themselves” (3). In his perception, *indigeneity* is relational, and its meanings change over time and place from the negotiated performances of power and rights claims in different postcolonial and international settings.

Bens approaches the concept of indigeneity from his professional experience as a lawyer, adopting the conceptual framework of legal anthropology for the analysis of court cases as ethnographic texts. Using this methodology, he identifies the principles of sovereignty and culture as two pathways to assert indigenous rights: the first stemming from constitutional law, and the second from the evolution of human rights conventions beginning in the mid-twentieth century. Sovereignty upholds the rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination as nations, while the defense of culture is derived from the protection of human rights for persons against the infringements of the state. Most frequently cited among the international institutions in support of Indigenous rights are the agreements and forums provided by the International Labour Organization, the Organization of American States through its Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the United Nations through its Economic and Social Council. While the principles of sovereignty and culture have different origins, as Bens argues, they are braided together in the practices of legal pluralism observed in distinct historical cases to advance Indigenous rights.

Bens acknowledges the deep historical traditions for international law in the Roman *ius gentium*, Catholic Church canon law, and natural law that underly the modern conception of the collective rights of Indigenous peoples. Similarly, he recognizes the legal principles of statutory law for Iberian colonial and postcolonial states, but he does not apply them to the cases he included in this book. The histories of specific rights cases on which Bens builds his argument all pertain to the common law basis of settler colonial societies, mainly within British imperial domains and their juridical legacy for the United States and Canada. They include three seminal cases from the early nineteenth-century US Supreme Court, a pivotal case for late twentieth-century British Columbia employing both sovereignty and culture principles, two cases from the former Dutch colony of Suriname, and one from Nicaragua; the last three were decided by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Bens follows these cases with two chapters that summarize the debates over multiculturalism and the merits of cultural recognition and redistributive justice. *Indigenous Paradox* provides a valuable reference tool for scholars and activists working in the Americas and in other postcolonial settings around the world. It provides a strong basis for comparing the multiple valences of *indigeneity* and the distinct meanings that Indigenous communities ascribe to its cultural and juridical contexts.

The following three books provide historical depth for the considerations of modern Indigenous histories reviewed thus far. *La frontera de arriba en Chile colonial* by María Ximena Urbina Carrasco leads us to the southernmost frontier of Chile and of all South America. Urbina creates a closely detailed portrait of the fluvial borderlands surrounding

the islands of Chiloé and the strait that communicates them with the Chilean mainland. Described by Urbina as an archipelago, the “frontera de arriba” became an extended borderland that challenged Spanish imperial dominion, requiring repeated negotiations with the Indigenous peoples who navigated its waters, fished, hunted, and gathered from its abundant forests. The subtitle—“Hispanic-Indigenous Interaction in the Territory between Valdivia and Chiloé and the Imaginary of Its Geographic Borders, 1600–1800”—underscores the relational character of indigeneity as emphasized by Jonas Bens in his analysis of modern legal case studies. It signals that the history of these borderlands was a centuries-long process of violent encounters, negotiations, and changing perceptions of its territorial boundaries. For Spaniards this region became the “frontier above,” in the sensibility of southern hemisphere geography, because it extended beyond the contested borderland of the Araucanía, dominated by peoples they came to identify as Mapuche.

Urbina builds a detailed, critical reading of the different ethnonyms that appear in colonial sources for this region extending south of the Río Toltén to Chiloé. The dominant ethnic group came to be known as Huilliches, peoples of the plains, related linguistically to the Mapuches; moreover, they shared cultural patterns with the highland Pehuenches, the Osornos or Chauracahuines, and Juncos, but were distinguished from them by their internal lineages and geographic locations. As Urbina notes, the word *Huilliche* does not appear consistently in the documentation until the late eighteenth century; rather colonial texts identified the native population as “Indians of Junco and Osorno,” referring to early Spanish settlements and the distribution of Indigenous groups in *encomiendas* of tribute and labor service (40–58). Her carefully documented discussion points to the instability of European ethnic labels, even as it implies a process of ethnogenesis, as shown by Guillaume Boccara for the Mapuche.<sup>2</sup>

The violence inherent in this frontier stemmed from the *malocas*, Spanish slaving expeditions that fell upon its Indigenous peoples in violation of the New Laws of 1542 and, in different periods, under the veneer of legality as “just war” against “rebellious” nations. Men, women, and children captured in these *malocas* were exploited directly for their labor and sold to Spanish settlements to the north, in a widespread “vicious trade” involving governors, soldiers, and Hispano-*criollo* settlers (75–106). The word itself—*malón*—and the practice of seizing captives came from the Mapuche operating on both sides of the Andean cordillera, who attacked other Indigenous peoples and Spanish settlements. After the arrival of the horse, the *maloca* became a rapacious light cavalry that swept through the land, obligating Indigenous bands to submit or flee and taking captives for enslavement. Urbina relates these practices that were so ingrained in the region to medieval Iberian “wars of attrition” that Spaniards inflicted on Muslim communities, and she draws comparisons to other colonial frontiers in the Americas. Urbina traces a direct connection between the *malocas* and the dramatic uprising of 1598–1604, when the various Indigenous nations put aside their internal differences and forced the Spaniards to abandon three of the four settlements in the provinces of Osorno and Valdivia, leaving Castro on the island of Chiloé a distant and isolated outpost of the imagined imperial frontier. The *frontera de arriba* became largely an Indigenous borderland until the resettlement of Valdivia in 1645. Spanish forays into the interior from the military forts surrounding the narrow Canal de Chacao separating the northern coast of Chiloé from the mainland, the intervention of Jesuit missionaries and secular clergy, and the role of the “indios de paz” who allied with Spaniards, permitted the gradual return of a colonial presence in these southernmost provinces.

Urbina frames her carefully woven history within a conceptual analysis of the different meanings of *frontier*. Beginning with the etymology of the term (Latin: *frons*, *frontis*), she

<sup>2</sup> Guillaume Boccara, *Guerre et ethnogenèse mapuche dans le Chili colonial: L'invention du soi* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998).

distinguishes between the sense of a line or boundary and the spatial histories of frontiers with flexible borders responding to the dynamic processes of settlement and migration, trade, violent encounters, and displacement. She traces the historiography of frontiers in the Americas from classic authors like José Ortega y Gasset, Alfredo Jiménez Núñez, Sergio Villalobos, and Hebe Clementi, drawing comparisons and contrasts across the imperial spheres of British North America, the Portuguese coastal enclaves of Africa and Brazil, and the vassalage of Indigenous peoples in Spanish America, albeit with unequal status and unforeseen cultural exchanges. Urbina's *Frontera de Arriba* contributes to the literature on borderlands conceptually and empirically, placing southern Chile in the global framework of frontier peoples and geographies.

The comparative dimension that Ximena Urbina wove throughout her book provides a useful segue to Pekka Hämäläinen's *Indigenous Continent: The Epic Contest for North America*. The histories he has woven into it invert the cast of characters for the theater of imperialism, placing Indigenous nations in the principal roles as protagonists of the colonial drama. In line with the historiography of colonial encounters over the last quarter century, Hämäläinen eschews the notion of conquest, replacing it with contest, invoking a multilateral power struggle among different Amerindian, European, African, and Asian actors. If these contests were, indeed, "epic," their outcomes were not predetermined, nor could the ways that power flowed through different peoples and societies be predicted.<sup>3</sup>

*Indigenous Continent* comprehends eight parts, each composed of three to five chapters that move chronologically from the early sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries and spatially from the Atlantic seaboard to the interior of the continent. Part 1, "The Dawn of the Indigenous Continent," portrays ancient civilizations and lifeways in the Americas before the intrusion of Europeans. With due attention to geological and climatic factors—like the Little Ice Age—Hämäläinen traces the development of agriculture, increasing social complexity, urban centers, knowledge production, and ceremonial life in the North American subcontinent. Hovering over the urban centers of Cahokia, at the juncture of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers, and Paquimé in the foothills of the northern Sierra Madre Occidental at the turn of the second millennium CE, Hämäläinen posits a lasting divergence between North America and Mesoamerica. The latter, he contends, continued on the path to greater concentration of power in city-states, ceremonial hierarchies, and high-density populations, while the former reverted to village life, in which power was shared across local units whose subsistence derived from horticulture, hunting, and gathering. In the Great Plains the effects of a wet, cold climate favored the proliferation of grasses and bison herds, attracting different migratory groups with communal hunting techniques. Indigenous North America, in his view, moved in the direction of collective and egalitarian societies (12–24).

Hämäläinen's assertion of a radical contrast in native political cultures during the three-to-four centuries prior to European contact sets the boundaries for his study, tellingly in opposition to recent archaeological, ethnohistorical, and ethnobotanical research.<sup>4</sup> His decision to separate North America from the northern borderlands of

<sup>3</sup> Three collective volumes serve to illustrate the dynamic quality of borderlands studies and the changing lens for conquests and encounters in the Americas: Donna J. Guy and Thomas E. Sheridan, eds., *Contested Ground: Comparative Frontiers on the Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998); Juliana Barr and Edward Countryman, eds., *Contested Spaces of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Danna A. Levin Rojo and Cynthia Radding, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Borderlands of the Iberian World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). These publications in English complement similar works in Spanish, French, and Portuguese by interdisciplinary teams of Latin American scholars.

<sup>4</sup> Important references include Fernando Berrojalbíz, *Paisajes y fronteras del Durango prehispánico* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2012); Carlo Bonfiglioli et al., eds., *Las vías del Noroeste*, 3 vols. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006–2011); Marie-Areti Hers et al., eds., *Nómadas y sedentarios en el Norte de México: Homenaje a Beatriz Braniff* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2000).



Mesoamerica truncates complex long-distance exchanges of knowledge, subsistence products, and ceremonial goods that made these borderlands dynamic and multidimensional. By laying aside the territorial rivalries among lineages and population centers that conditioned early Indigenous encounters with Europeans, Hämäläinen narrows the vision of an Indigenous continent that he endeavors to project. Even though his narrative takes into account Dutch relations with the Iroquois and other eastern tribes and French settlements extending from Montreal to the Great Lakes, the Mississippi valley and Louisiana, the “epic contest” at the heart of this history basically maps onto British America. War constitutes the central unifying theme of these separate histories. Parts 5 and 6 narrate the mutual dependency and conditional alliances among different Indigenous peoples and, alternatively, French and British military and civil authorities. Hämäläinen recasts the Seven Years’ War and the Revolutionary War from the point of view of the Indigenous nations who decided for neutrality or allied with one or another of the contenders in the face of diminished numbers and the need to strategize for their own survival.<sup>5</sup> Part 8 circles back in time and space to present the powerful Lakota and Comanche-Ute confederations, drawing on Hämäläinen’s previously published research and the considerable scholarship on the Great Plains. Recent revisionist histories have questioned the legendary power of these equestrian tribal nations.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout this ambitious synthesis, however, the multiethnic frontiers of northern New Spain remain in the shadows. Missing are the Mesoamerican allies, numbering in the thousands, who made possible Spanish advances northward from central Mexico and established enduring colonies of their own in Durango, San Luis Potosí, Nuevo León, Coahuila, and New Mexico.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the oft-cited Athapaskan bands of Dné peoples and the Uto-Aztecan Comanches and Utes, distinct groups of village dwellers and seminomadic foragers moved seasonally through these borderlands, creating linguistic chains and trading networks across long distances, as exemplified by the Tepima/O’odham/Odami and Taracáhita peoples of present-day northwestern Mexico and southwestern United States. The survival of Indigenous nations in North America embraces those communities that reconstituted their ethnic polities within the institutional framework of the Spanish imperium, incorporating Catholic liturgical rituals into their cosmologies and ceremonial life, sustaining their economies, and defending their territories through colonial courts. Without that foundation, Hämäläinen’s chapters devoted to Alta California, New Mexico, and Florida treat these provinces as isolates, rather than as integral parts of the Indigenous borderlands of North America with deeply entwined histories that intersect with Spanish and French territorial claims and settlements in North America.

The complexity of cultural transfers through colonial encounters comes to the foreground in Guillermo Wilde’s edited volume, *Saberes de la conversión: Jesuitas, indígenas e imperios coloniales en las fronteras de la cristiandad*. This major work expands the concept of frontier to embrace the cultural frontiers of knowledge production and dissemination. Twenty-five authors contributed chapters to this collective work, grouped into six sections on the construction of knowledge in different colonial contexts: the use of languages in the missions and the production of written texts; the application of science to the goals of conversion; the transformed meanings attached to sacraments, relics, and sacred objects that circulated in the missions; the aesthetic dimensions of culture and religion through

<sup>5</sup> This interpretation follows Kathleen Duval’s innovative *Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> See Joaquín Rivaya-Martínez, “The Unsteady Comanchería: A Reexamination of Power in the Indigenous Borderlands of the Eighteenth-Century Greater Southwest,” *William & Mary Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (2023): 251–286.

<sup>7</sup> Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk, *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007).

music, architecture, and the visual arts; geopolitics and differences in the art of governance; the tension between cultural dialogue and conflict. This last section moves beyond the Americas to China, South Asia, and Muslim heritages in early modern Europe. Its global dimension expands the concept of indigeneity to embrace the notion of alterity (“otherness”) across a wide spectrum of cultures and political formations in the Asian and American arenas of Jesuit evangelization. At the same time, it highlights the relational quality of indigeneity, as defined by Jonas Bens, but focused here on the multistranded histories of encounters and transcultural exchanges between Jesuit missionaries and native peoples in the parallel enterprises of conversion and the production of knowledge.

Jesuits appear in this book as central figures in the web of relationships that sustained the mission pueblos and the global mission to which they had committed their lives and resources. Nevertheless, their position as narrators of the mission experience and their very *raison d'être* are predicated on the presence of Indigenous peoples as historical actors and protagonists in the coconstruction of colonial spaces. Guillermo Wilde’s introduction lays out the central questions that each of the chapters addresses from different regional and thematic vantage points: how can the entwined histories of indigeneity and religious conversion be researched and understood from both the global perspective of early modern imperialism and the mission experience as a locus of cultural encounters and adaptations? In what ways do Jesuit histories—as constructed “regimes of social memory”—reveal the active presence of Indigenous peoples in the daily life of the missions and in the production and dissemination of knowledge (24–25)?

Jesuit writings remain central to the different scales of mission history (local, provincial, and global), but they do not stand alone. Their interpretation is conditioned and enriched by the cultural artifacts that document the mission experience, ranging from Indigenous-authored catechisms and sermons to musical compositions and instruments crafted in the missions, architecture, the built environment of mission towns, and mural art. Outstanding among the artifacts of Indigenous knowledge production are the Guaraní maps analyzed by Artur Barcelos, in “El saber cartográfico entre los guaraníes de las misiones jesuíticas.” Indigenous botanical knowledge contributed directly to the medical sciences of the era, as illustrated by the chapter co-authored by Sabine Anagnostou and Fabian Fechner, “Historia natural y farmacia misionera entre los jesuitas del Paraguay.”

The contributing authors of *Saberes de la conversión* underscore the practices of cultural adaptation that distinguished Jesuit missionaries from other evangelizing orders of early modern global Catholicism. These adaptive strategies crystallized into the doctrine of *acomodatio*, by which Jesuits distinguished between religion and custom. Jesuit missionaries and historians treated separately, and to some degree ethnographically, the kinds of cultural habits, techniques, and knowledges that they observed in different Indigenous groups, separately from the concerns with orthodoxy and “idolatry” that overshadowed the religious enterprise itself. Language played an important role as a vehicle of conversion in the adaptive methodologies of Jesuit missionaries. As Andrea Daher observes in her chapter, “De los intérpretes a los especialistas: El uso de las lenguas generales de América en los siglos XVI y XVII,” their mandate to master the languages of the Indigenous peoples they hoped to evangelize informed their efforts to create written grammars for oral languages and even to produce synthetic “general languages” (*linguas gerais*) to facilitate the dissemination of Christian doctrine.

In the mission theaters of the Orient—China, India and Japan—Jesuits (and other religious orders) found themselves among highly developed civil and political institutions and, thus, endeavored to instill Catholic doctrinal and moral values in these societies without appearing to disturb their political structures. Jesuits in the Asian mission fields adopted the dress of Brahmans and other elite social strata and, famously, Mateo Ricci gained acceptance in the courts of China through his mathematical skills and his efforts to reconcile the philosophical content of Christianity and Confucianism. As Wilde observes,

the Jesuits underwent a cultural conversion to achieve a religious conversion among the Indigenous peoples of these complex societies (18–19). Yoshimi Orii explicates the processes of translating Christian concepts into the Japanese syllabary and their dissemination through Jesuit publications, in “Interacción dogmática, libros espirituales traducidos del español al japonés en el siglo ibérico de Japón.” Jesuit practices of adaptation and discretion failed in early seventeenth-century Japan, nevertheless, leading to their violent expulsion by order of Shogunato Tokugawa in 1614, and the destruction of most of their literary production in that island archipelago.

To be sure the Jesuit methodology of *acomodatio* was not universally accepted, leading to differences and divisions within the Society of Jesus. Furthermore, idiosyncratic differences in the attitudes and practices of individual missionaries punctuated the histories of Indigenous-Jesuit relations in both the American and Asian mission fields. Taken together, the essays in this volume explore the central relationship between religious conversion and knowledge production and they reflect on the problematic of cultural and religious dialogue. They point to a paradox of both historical and intellectual significance for the mission enterprise, which traces a dimension of autonomy that adds layers of meaning to the paradox of indigeneity defined by Jonas Bens in the political realm. *Saberes de la conversión* posits that the missions instituted new forms of social organization centered in the Indigenous village councils, native catechists, musicians, and administrators of the mission economy. Over time, the Indigenous men and women who dwelled in and sustained the missions adapted these civic and religious institutions and social practices to their own purposes, turning them into the means of autonomous religious and cultural identity in relation to the missionaries and to the colonial societies in which they were immersed.

In summary, enduring indigenous histories weave together a multi-stranded network of alliances, conflicts, and streams of knowledge production and exchange that antedate European contact by millennia. In both North and South America these networks conditioned and shaped the imperial borderlands and contests of early modern imperialism. Modern encounters among nation-states and Indigenous nations over fundamental issues of sovereignty, territoriality, and cultural integrity exhibit deep continuities with the past as well as sharp qualitative differences in technologies, material survival, and cultural processes of conservation and ethnogenesis. Recent scholarship on cultural and territorial borderlands across space and time in the Americas, as seen in the works reviewed in this essay, challenges historians and social scientists to rethink conventional assumptions and to work across disciplinary boundaries in collaboration with Indigenous elders, scholars, and activists.

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